



Connecticut Department of Public Health

Testimony Presented Before the Public Health Committee

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House Bill 6856 - An Act Concerning Substance Abuse and Opioid Overdose Prevention

The Department of Public Health strongly supports House Bill 6856, An Act Concerning Substance Abuse and Opioid Overdose Prevention. The Department worked in close collaboration with other state agencies including OPM, DMHAS, DCP, and other community partners to develop the language in this bill that includes a comprehensive set of statutory changes to reduce the burden of substance abuse and overdose deaths in Connecticut related to prescription opiates.

According to 2013 data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, over half (51.8%) of the 43,982 drug overdose deaths in the United States were related to pharmaceutical drugs. More than two thirds (71.3%) of the 22,267 deaths related to pharmaceutical drugs involved opioid analgesics.ⁱ According to the Connecticut Chief Medical Examiner, there were 307 Connecticut overdose deaths in 2014. A number of those deaths were due to heroin used in combination with prescription opioids. The strategies outlined in HB 6856 provide an opportunity to reduce the public health impacts of addiction to, and the number of overdose deaths resulting from, opioids.

The language proposed in this bill will require physicians, APRNs, physician assistants, and dentists to complete training on prescribing controlled substances and pain management as part of their already required continuing education in order to maintain licensure. A recent study in the American Journal of Public Health showed that a state-mandated continuing education program for health care professionals is reducing opioid abuse and overdose rates.ⁱⁱ The goal of these mandated educational programs is to assure that opioids are prescribed safely and responsibly.

This bill will also enhance use of the Department of Consumer Protection's Prescription Drug Monitoring Program by prescribers and pharmacists to assure accurate and up-to-date information on patient prescription histories is available to practitioners at the time they are contemplating writing a prescription. In 2013, following a 2012 requirement in New York State

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for prescribers to check the state's prescription drug monitoring program before prescribing painkillers, there was a 75% reduction in the number of patients seeing multiple prescribers to obtain the same drug. This type of drug-seeking behavior puts patients at higher risk of overdose.ⁱⁱⁱ

As the agency that licenses health care professionals, the Department is pleased that this bill will clarify in statute that prescribing Narcan, an opioid antagonist that can reverse an opioid overdose, does not violate the standard of care for a qualified licensed health care professional who prescribes it.

The passage of this bill will further advance Connecticut's efforts to stem prescription drug abuse and overdose deaths through the Connecticut Alcohol and Drug Policy Council that will be re-established within DMHAS. The Department is pleased to participate on the Council, and to bring public health education and prevention expertise.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to testify on this bill.

ⁱ <http://www.cdc.gov/homeandrecrationalafety/overdose/facts.html>

ⁱⁱ <http://hscnews.unm.edu/news/education-program-successful-in-reducing-opioid-abuse010715>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/opioid-prescribing/infographic.html#map>